

TRUCK THIEVES BRING \$5,000,000 YEARLY IN GOODS TO FENCES



Prominent in the fight against truck thieves left to right Samuel Gore of Executive committee, Joseph J. Goldstein, counsel, Morse M. Frankel, director, Horse Owners Association, and Jacob Witkin, a truckman active in the fight



New York City is the richest field in the world for package and truck thieves

This Is the Total for New York City Alone, and Includes Booty from Package Thievery and Other Gang Stealings—Methods of Crooks and Fight Against Them.

By Edwin Newdick.

A FIVE-MILLION-DOLLAR annual business in stolen goods is the text of this story. The systematized methods and combination for protection justify calling it a "business"; the estimate of its annual volume is on the authority of the Merchants' Association of New York. This story will help in understanding why gangs flourish in New York City and why police methods are so often unsatisfactory and corrupt, for police graft from stolen goods is the most profitable for the individual grafter of all forms.

Goods can be ordered stolen by telephone—details given of the kind wanted, the amount and the date on which they are desired—and these goods will be delivered with as businesslike promptness as in the legitimate commercial field. Details of such instances can be given, including the case of a manufacturer in Paterson who was ordering and buying goods which he manufactured himself, stolen to fill orders he himself gave and sold back to him for less than he could make them for—and the thieves not caught.

"FENCE" THE LEADING FIGURE.

The "fence," as the man in the business of receiving stolen goods is called, is the most important figure in the traffic; he not only receives and disposes of the stolen goods, but he has a squad of thieves working for him, gives directions in many instances as to what goods shall be stolen and how, "takes care" of the police and protects the men in his employ. Usually the "fence" has an auction store, where goods are sold which can safely be disposed of in this way, but he has various other means of handling stolen goods, such as shipping them away, storing them till the search is over or delivering them to some trusted customer, who knows they are stolen, but is safe because his guilty knowledge can't be proved.

Truck stealing, package thievery and "straight" burglary are the main classifications of the way goods are gotten by the "fence." Burglary is an important and useful method, but is usually less desirable from the "fence's" standpoint because of the greater stir and consequent search for the goods, which are therefore less easily and safely disposed of. Truck stealing consists of taking a load of goods, wagon, horses and all. This is the best way. Package thievery is the taking of one or a few packages or cases at a time from a wagon. This is an important method, and by it thousands of dollars' worth of goods are stolen almost daily. When packages are small, this thievery can readily be done by those in the under classes of New York's college for gangsters—the public streets.

CASES OF WORK OF EXPERTS.

Some incidents of the way goods are stolen will be helpful for an understanding of methods. These are actual cases and typical of the ingenuity and coolness of the technique of the experts in this profession.

A "fence" or one of his lieutenants, a driver of a truck load of salable goods to be carted from one pier or warehouse to another. Two thieves follow the truck; probably one is in a small carriage or wagon and the other walking. The man walking has the other walking-man's hook in his pocket and is the one designated to steal the truck. Just the moment the driver is out of sight of his truck, the thief on the sidewalk is on the seat and drives it off, having taken off his coat and hung the hook about his neck so that he appears to be a regular truck driver. He drives the truck around corners till in a busy section, eight or ten blocks away, the accomplice in the carriage following and watching for danger. In front of a large building with a number of tenants and usually with other cases on the sidewalk, the stolen cases are dumped, the sides with the address down, so as not to be visible. Then the empty truck is driven a few blocks farther and left to be found too late to help in the discovery of the goods, for not for several hours, at least, will anybody know that the truck has been abandoned.

THE SUBTERRANEAN CHANNELS.

The "fence" with whom the thieves who have stolen the truck do business is notified, sends another truck for the cases and takes them away. Sometimes they go to the "fence's" store, where the goods are taken from the cases, the cases destroyed and the goods cleaned of any tags which might help in identification and repacked; sometimes the goods may be driven into a friendly stable, a receipt in a fictitious name given by the stableman (he may have a storehouse also), and the names

scratched off the cases or the goods put in new cases and left there until the time of danger is past. Or, the goods

may be stored in a vacant basement hired by a dummy under a false name and left there. In either case, if the goods are discovered, no one is caught, for the "fence" never comes for them unless all is safe. He knows, even if there is no friendly detective to tip him off—more of that later.

Truck stealing isn't usually so simple a matter. There has been so much of it that every honest driver is cautious and careful not to violate his instructions never to leave his truck unwatched. Various methods are used by thieves to get the driver away from his load. In one instance, successfully worked recently, the thieves, who knew the driver's destination, telephoned to the people to whom the goods were going and left word for the driver (whose name they gave) to call the stable when he came. The message was given to him, and while he was at the telephone discovering that the stable had left no such request for him to call the load disappeared.

INGENUITY OF KNAVERY.

Here is a still more ingenious plan, worked successfully about a month ago. The thieves watched until the driver had arrived with his load and then from a nearby saloon called the place where the goods were being delivered and asked the driver called to the "phone," saying that it was the stable calling. The driver came to the "phone," was called by name and told that another truck from the same stable had broken down at such and such address (a dozen blocks away) and that this driver was to go to the assistance of the broken down truck, leaving his load in charge of his "tail boy," the young lad who rides on the tail of a truck to prevent the stealing of small packages.

The driver was told to leave his receipts for the rest of his load in charge of the tail boy with instructions to deliver them to another driver, who would be sent to take the load and finish deliveries. The driver went to find the broken truck; another driver came along, got the receipts from the tail boy, sent the tail boy after a box of cigarettes and stole the load while the boy was gone. The presence of the tail boy made this more complicated plan necessary.

In nine out of ten cases of truck stealing the driver is an accomplice, say men in the Horse Owners' Protective Association, which is working to stamp out truck and package stealing. Here is an illustration of the way a driver is gotten into league with the "fence."

TEMPTATION OF DRIVERS.

The "fence" himself, or one of his lieutenants, invites a driver to have a drink, and they talk it over. The driver is flattered. After being "sounded," the thief tells him he is a fool to be working for less than is paid for the horses, when he might easily and safely make a thousand dollars now and then. The temptation is too much for the driver. It is explained that all he has to do is, when he has a load of good, salable stuff, is to telephone the "fence" as to when and where he will leave the load unwatched for a few minutes. It is arranged that sound proof that the driver had nothing to do with the theft shall be provided. A load is stolen. Here are a couple of instances of the manner in which the driver's alibi is arranged:

The truck thief's opportunity He follows on foot and steals the truck when the driver leaves it. The thief's watcher follows in a covered wagon on the lookout for danger

The driver goes into a restaurant for a cup of coffee. He pays for it with a dollar bill torn in halves, apologizing, telling how the bill got torn, that it is all he has, and so on, an incident easily recalled afterward by the restaurant cashier. He goes out, and returns in a minute in excitement, saying that his load is gone. Several persons rush out to see, a policeman is searched for, and there is delay enough to allow the thieves to get a few blocks away, after which they are safe. Then the driver calls his boss and tells of the loss.

In another case the alibi is furnished by railroad pier receipts. The driver has cases for several lines. He notifies the "fence" where the load will be, goes to the pier where he has only one or two cases to deliver, and while he is delivering there the rest of the load disappears. The driver has the receipt to show for the goods delivered. Sometimes he asks another truck driver near his truck to watch it, but this man is in on the game or otherwise disposed of.

The railroad and steamship lines are very heavy losers. They hire their own special detectives, use all the care they can, take their losses and say little about them.

Did you ever see the waterfront streets late in the afternoon filled with loaded trucks waiting to deliver goods at some pier? The package thief finds many opportunities in those jams of trucks. Many times a thief has hired a truck, put on a couple of cases of sawdust and stood in line. Along will come a truckman who has one or two cases for that pier and the rest of his load for elsewhere. If he stands in line at each pier where he must go, he will be late to get all his goods off that day. So at the first pier, where he has only two cases to leave, he picks out a truckman waiting, who has some spare room on his wagon, and asks him to take the two cases for that pier. The truckman with whom he trusts his cases is the thief who has a couple of cases of sawdust on his wagon for "decoys" and may collect a dozen cases that way in a single afternoon. He stays in line, ships off his cases of sawdust and goes off with the others. This trick is old and not worked so much now, truck drivers being too careful to trust their cases with other drivers whom they don't know.

ON A FAKE ORDER.

It was learned that a New York merchant, Morris Herrmann, had twenty-seven bales of woollens waiting for him at one of the piers, that there was some disagreement about the goods and that Herrmann had refused to accept the goods. A driver appeared at the pier with an order from Herrmann for the goods and paid \$5 freight. The goods were stolen, the driver being a thief and the order a fake.

Frequently the knowledge which the "fence" gets of the movements of certain goods is the secret of his success. Here is an example.

A SHIFT IN 'PHONE NUMBERS.

A fourth avenue silk house was the victim of a similar game. A letterhead of the company was used in preparing the order for getting the goods to be stolen; on the letterhead was printed "Telephone Gramercy," the number of a saloon being inserted instead of the number of the silk house. When the order was presented, with cash to pay the freight, instead of a check, as was the company's custom, the delivery clerk was suspicious.

The driver, noticing this, said: "Call up Mr. So-and-so, the bookkeeper." The delivery clerk reached for the telephone directory. The driver said: "You've got the number right on the letterhead." The clerk glanced at it and called that number, asked for Mr. So-and-so, got the reply that they did send for goods and were paying the freight by cash because the treasurer was out and they didn't want to wait for him to return to sign a check. That little game resulted in the thief's getting nine cases of silk worth at least \$5,000.

There are other clever "stunts" worked in stealing packages. A thief will stand in front of the delivery entrance of a loft building to which he knows goods are coming for one of the tenants. The truck comes up. He calls to the driver, "Got those two cases from the Mallory Line for Smith & Son?" The truckman has them and the man with the pencil signs the receipts, saying: "Hustle and chuck those off, will you? We've been waiting an hour for those." The thief's wagon is

REMNNANT OF OLDTIME WHALING FLEET

Continued from second page.

One of the men, however, on going below, discovered that the forecastle was full of water. This informed the captain that the ship was sinking, and signals were run up to the mastsheads, ordering all the boats to return to the ship. But the officers in charge refused to obey, not knowing that anything was seriously amiss, and they continued to stay away until the bark had disappeared. The Kathleen sank slowly and the crew was left in the open whaleboats with a scanty store of provisions, and a thousand miles from land. In spite of this, however, no lives were lost, as some of the boats were picked up by a passing steamer, while the rest, after nine days, reached the Barbadoes, having had aboard only a little ship biscuit and a few gallons of water.

SUPPLANTED BY STEAM WHALER

Economically the steam whaler has supplanted the old bark, and while the New Bedford whaling fleet is first in interest it is by no means the most prominent part of the world's whaling outlay. Whaling is now conducted scientifically by Norway and other nations, and the value of whale meat as a food supply is fully realized by the Orientals. In many parts of the world steam whalers ply a profitable trade and have largely taken the place of the old barks, while the New Bedford whaling schooners remaining at sea for periods of eighteen to twenty-four months sometimes bring to port a part of the cargo of the bulkier and more old-fashioned vessels.

The future of the whaler cannot be

guessed at, but whale oil is being used more widely than it was some five or ten years ago. It is valuable for diluting, and is one of the best machinery oils that the market can produce. Whalebone, on the other hand, has largely lost its value. But as the whale comes to be recognized as a food animal it is probable that it will be pursued to the verge of extinction, that the whalemen may appear once more in the foreground and that canned whale meat may yet take a prominent place on the metropolitan menu.

THE RIGHT PLACE.

Jack London, the novelist, was contrasting the acquisition of a millionaire manufacturer on a dynamite planting charge with the severe sentence imposed on a poor editor for too strongly championing the Paterson strikers.

"The rich are ever leniently dealt with in our courts," he said, "and the poor are ever harshly dealt with. This will keep on until the American people come to respect only honest wealth—till they come to regard all wealth gained through trickery and deceit as the Englishman did."

"This Englishman, at a dinner in New York, hailed with delight the conviction by the courts of an American who had stolen millions by means of bogus mines."

"But a friend of the criminal heaved a sigh and said:

"Poor old Charlie! His heart's in the right place, anyway."

"Yes," said the Englishman, "and so, thank Heaven, is the rest of him for the next four years."

Wily Tricks of the Thieves Often Make the Fences, Real Leaders of the Felonious Traffic, Wealthy—Expert Forecasts Doom of This Manner of Knavery.

brought up as soon as the truckman goes and the goods taken off.

But what about the man in the business of regularly receiving stolen goods? How does he work? Why isn't he caught? In the first place, the "fence" knows his business, and part of his business is avoiding trouble. Probably there is no important "fence" who cannot depend upon getting "tips" from some friendly detective. The detective makes a good thing out of the "fence's" business, and there may be only one collecting from him. It is essential to the "fence" that he stand right for his own protection and in order to look out for the men working for him, so he and the detective work together.

The combination of "fence" and detective is not only profitable, but otherwise advantageous for the detective. When there is a "bad" case on which a showing must be made the "fence" gives information so that the goods are recovered, probably from the "fence" himself, the detective protecting him in return for the information. Recovery of the goods is usually enough to satisfy the man who lost them; if not, a victim is chosen for arrest, who may or may not be in on the game. Sometimes the case against the thief is "beaten," sometimes he has to be sent up, but this only in emergencies. Sometimes, of course, a "fence" gets into trouble with honest detectives, or the case against him is so bad that he has to go up.

THE INDEPENDENT WORKERS.

The "fence" does not always have his thieves working directly for him. A nice arrangement for the "fence" is to act as a sort of commission merchant for the thieves who get stuff that they know the "fence" wants, deliver it to him when he is ready and are paid according to the value of the stolen goods. These thieves, working somewhat independently, must know the game, not embarrass the "fence" with the wrong kind of goods or too large amounts in too short spaces of time.

The prices which the "fence" gets for the goods he receives depend upon the ease with which the goods can be sold. If the goods are unidentifiable the "fence" is safe and can get fairly close to the wholesale price of the goods. The men who steal for him get widely varying amounts for their services. A capable thief who engineers thefts, gets the minor workers to whatever "fence" he pleases and must be well used to keep the business. A thief who is in the employ of the "fence" will rarely get more than 15 per cent of the value of what he steals, and is often paid a lump sum for the job.

KEEPS THEM "ON THE STRING."

The "fence" keeps the thieves who work for him as friendly as possible to him by loans, protection of their interests and so on. Drivers are especially valuable allies, so the "fence" never loses an opportunity to give a driver "dinner money," something for drinks, a dollar here and there to keep the driver in good humor. The business got through the driver is very profitable, because the driver seldom knows anything about the real value of the goods stolen and must take the "fence's" word.

How do the "fences" develop? Take Smerling, for instance, who got away with \$15,000 worth of one man's goods in three years. He had two clothing stores on Canal street, was doing a comparatively honest business and had credit worth \$150,000, made by economy and hard work. He saw how profitable it was to buy stolen goods, and did so often. Then he became envious of the "fence's" profit, for he saw that many times the "fence" got the goods from the thief for a song. Smerling became a "fence." He began to squander his money, his clothing business suffered until he had a failure. Then he had only a small store on Canal street, near Baxter, but did a good "fence" business, having a man out soliciting thefts, especially among truck drivers. Smerling got into trouble by getting drivers whom he had done out of most of the value of what they stole "sore," and they, when

THE KNELL OF THE TRAFFIC.

Here's a prophecy: The traffic in stolen goods will be stopped. It will never be completely wiped out, of course, but it can and will be reduced by nearly 90 per cent. Horse poisoning has been checked off, practically eradicated, as was explained in last week's article in this series. Horse stealing has been reduced tremendously, and war against the East Side gangs is on, as will be explained in coming articles. Methods similar to those used by Morse M. Frankel and his associates of the Horse Owners' Protective Association in stamping out horse poisoning will be tried in connection with package and truck stealing.

An organization of truck drivers has been started. In connection with this there will be an employment agency for drivers. The record of each driver will be kept and his membership in the association will be practically a guarantee that he is honest. There will probably be sick and unemployment benefits, too. The drivers' association will have its own employes to watch for careless drivers who give thieves an opportunity and to run down dishonest drivers and get them punished. One of the most essential things is to punish thieves who are now often, if not usually, able to get off by restoring the goods stolen in a case which gets them into trouble.

It is figured that 90 per cent of the truck stealing is the result of dishonesty among drivers. The drivers' association will aim to eliminate that 90 per cent, in so far as possible, and to fight gangs of thieves. There are many gangs known—"Little Archie's," "The Wops," "The Allen and Stanton Street Mob," "The Forty Thieves," "The Cannon Street Gang," "The Harlem Crowd," and so on.

"FENCES" CAN BE ERADICATED.

More efficiency on the part of the police in apprehending and punishing these thieves and receivers of stolen goods may be expected. Much has been learned of late about the business of "fences." Good detective work would seem sure to make short work of "fences." If a man is known or believed to be a receiver of stolen goods it is not difficult to know how to "get" him. He must be shadowed, caught receiving the goods from the actual thief. One "fence" put out of business means that fifty or a hundred thieves are without an employer. The man who gave much of the material for this article, an intimate acquaintance of many gangsters (and one of the few honest men whom they know and trust), says that there are ten important "fences" who could be and ought to be put out of business and if they are put out of business there will be a thousand thieves who will have their chief employment cut off. There must be the established, dependable receiver of stolen goods or the thief cannot work.

There should be, further, much more rigid surveillance of auction stores. Many, if not most of these, are receivers of stolen goods and furnish the biggest market outside of the few big "fences" who are distinguished specialists. If these measures are followed the prophecy will come true.